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(54) Units for controlling the operating functions of a cycle

(57) A unit (22) of a system for controlling the operating functions of a cycle is able to co-operate functionally with at least one complementary unit (21) by means of at least one electrical connection (105). At least one (21) between said unit (22) and said complementary unit (21) is configured for being selectively removable from

the cycle, so that the electrical connection (105) is an electrical connection which can be decoupled by leaving exposed on the unit (22) at least one distal contact part (107). Associated to said at least one electrical connection is a switch (32), which can be selectively actuated for electrically insulating said exposed distal contact part (107) from said unit (22).

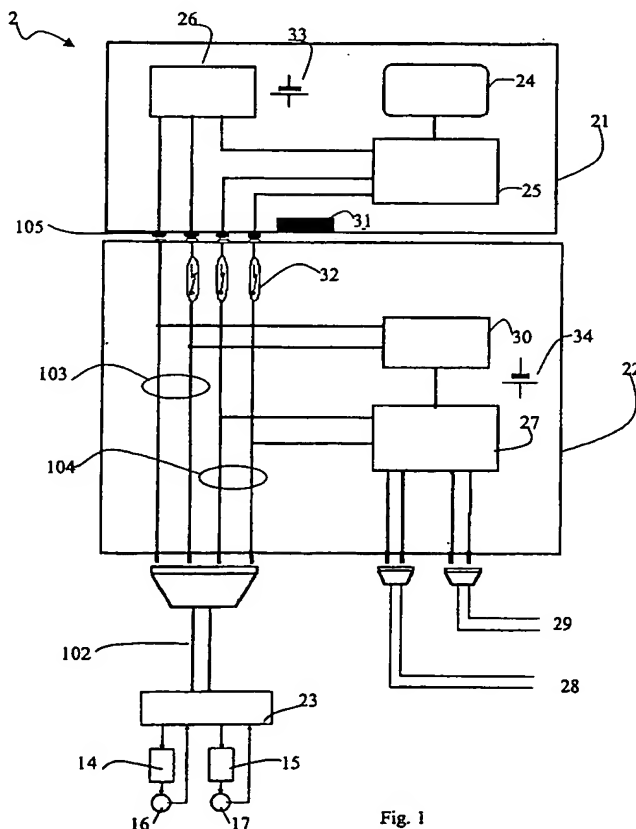


Fig. 1

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Description

Field of the invention

[0001] The present invention relates to control systems for cycles and has been developed with particular attention to competition bicycles. The reference to this possible application, and in particular to the application to racing bicycles, is not, however, to be meant in any way as limiting the possible field of application of the invention.

Description of the prior art

[0002] In the cycle field, over the last few years there has developed the tendency to provide electronic control systems to which different functions are delegated. Such electronic control systems are thus designed for receiving and processing the information gathered by sensors of different sorts, for obtaining information on the operation/running conditions of the cycle.

[0003] These electronic control systems are also designed for enabling the user to control actuators of different sorts for modifying, according to given criteria and by acting both in an automatic way and via specific commands issued by the user, the aforesaid operation/running conditions of the cycle. In particular, the technique is known of controlling the gear shift and the derailleur shift of a cycle by means of electrical actuators.

[0004] For the need to process and supply to the user information on the conditions of operation/running of the cycle, said control systems are provided with display units.

[0005] These display units contain a processor with storage capacity, the so-called cycle computer, in which there is stored information, which may comprise sensitive information regarding the user.

[0006] It is, therefore, useful to realize said display units removable, i.e., so that they can be separated from the electronic control system of the cycle.

[0007] A system for controlling the operating functions of a cycle of this sort is known, for instance, from the Italian patent application TO2000A000293 in the name of the present applicant.

[0008] In the above known control systems, when the display unit is removed, however, the remaining units carrying out the control system remain fixed on the cycle and, in particular, the electrical connection points present on said "fixed" units for enabling removable connection to the display unit remain exposed and unprotected from water, dust, impact, and tampering.

[0009] Such elements may jeopardize operation of the system and contribute to discharging the batteries of the units. Furthermore, the exposure of said contacts to the external environment may lie at the basis of phenomena of electrostatic shock, which are able to jeopardize operation of sensitive components, such as microprocessors comprised in the system.

Object and summary of the invention

[0010] The object of the present invention is to overcome the drawbacks outlined above and to propose a solution that will enable insulation of the connection points that remain exposed in a system for controlling the operating functions of a cycle when a removable part is removed.

[0011] According to the present invention, such an object is achieved by means of a system for controlling the operating functions of a cycle which comprises at least one unit having the features recalled specifically in the claims that follow.

[0012] Basically, the solution according to the invention foresees for equipping at least one of the units of the system with elements for interrupting electrical continuity, suitable for intervening in the presence of the removal of a unit of the system.

Brief description of the annexed drawings

[0013] The invention will now be described, purely by way of non-limiting example, with reference to the annexed drawings, in which:

- Figure 1 represents a schematic circuit diagram of a system for controlling the operating functions of a cycle according to the invention in a first configuration of operation;
- Figure 2 represents a partial schematic circuit diagram of a system for controlling the operating functions of a cycle according to the invention in a second configuration of operation; and
- Figures 3 and 4 represent, according to modalities substantially similar to those adopted in Figures 1 and 2, a variant embodiment of the solution described herein.

Detailed description of embodiments of the invention

[0014] Figure 1 illustrates a partial block diagram of a system 2 for controlling the operating functions of a cycle (not shown in the drawings).

[0015] In general terms, such a system is described in the document TO2000A000293 (already cited previously and here incorporated by reference); this makes a detailed description thereof unnecessary.

[0016] As regards this point, it will be sufficient to recall that the system 2 comprises a display unit 21, a control unit 22, and a power unit 23.

[0017] Among these, the control unit 22 and the power unit 23 are mounted on the cycle in conditions of stable assembly, i.e., in a "fixed" position. The display unit 21 is, instead, configured so as to be selectively removable from the cycle.

[0018] The power unit 23 provides for management of the positioning requests for the gearshift and for the derailleur, controlling the operation of a gear-shift actu-

ator 14 and a derailleur-shift actuator 15, which are associated to respective position transducers 16 and 17.

[0019] Said position transducers 16 and 17 provide the information on the position of the gearshift and of the derailleur-shift to the power unit 13 so as to enable optimal control of the actuators 14 and 15 and execution of procedures, such as zero-setting of the position of the actuators and compensation of drifts or offsets of the position.

[0020] The power unit 23 supplies the control unit 22 by means of a connection 102 coming under a supply bus 103, with associated a communication bus 104.

[0021] In addition, a connection 105 extends the buses 103 and 104 to the display unit 21.

[0022] The connection 105 is decouplable, i.e., it is detachable, to enable removal of the display unit 21, separating it from the rest of the system.

[0023] The connection 105 is realized by a suitable four-conductor male-female connector or else by sliding contacts, so as to have contacts 107 on the control unit 22 and corresponding contacts 108 on the display unit 21. Said contacts are represented schematically in Figures 2 and 4 only.

[0024] Connected in parallel on the communication bus 104 in the control unit 22, a microcontroller 27 is arranged, which is provided with inputs 28 and 29 for receiving respective controls corresponding to the gearshift and to the derailleur-shift. The microprocessor 27 thus provides for forwarding said commands, on the communication bus 104, to the power unit 23. The control unit 22 comprises an auxiliary supply circuit 30, which monitors, in a known way, operation of an auxiliary battery 34 for the microcontroller 27.

[0025] The display unit 21 comprises a display 24, driven by a microprocessor 25. The microprocessor 25 is designed for performing the cycle-computer functions and for communicating, by means of the communication bus 104, with the control unit 22.

[0026] An auxiliary supply circuit 26 monitors, in a known way, operation of an auxiliary battery 33 for the microcontroller 25.

[0027] The display unit 21 further comprises a magnet 31, which is located in the proximity of the connection 105, whilst three magnetic switches 32, of the reed-switch type, hence which are able to be activated for closure by the magnet 31, are placed on the communication bus 104 and on one of the conductors of the supply bus 103.

[0028] Consequently, when the display unit 21 is mounted on the cycle, the magnet 31 keeps the magnetic switches 32 closed.

[0029] Should the display unit 21 be removed, the magnet 31 mounted on it moves away from the magnetic switches 32. Said magnetic switches 32 open, electrically insulating the control unit 22 with respect to the distal ends 107 of the lines foreseen for connection to the display unit 21.

[0030] Consequently, the possible exposure of said

distal ends 107 to the external environment and to external agents is not able to have any influence on the control unit 22 (or on the power unit 23) since the aforesaid distal ends 107 are physically separated and isolated from the units 22 and 23 mounted on the cycle.

[0031] This fact can be even better appreciated from Figure 2, which relates to the situation in which the display unit 21 has been removed and displaced with respect to the control unit 22 by a distance such that the magnet 31 no longer exerts its force on the magnetic switches 32, which are in an opening position.

[0032] In particular, even though the contacts 107 remain uncovered and exposed, the corresponding conductors which belong to the supply bus 103 and to the communication bus 104 cannot, for example, be short-circuited by humidity that has condensed on top of the contacts 107. Said contacts 107 are in fact physically separated and isolated from the aforesaid conductors of the communication bus 104 and of the supply bus 103.

[0033] There is thus prevented any batteries discharging phenomena through the connection 105.

[0034] Likewise, any electrostatic charge transfer phenomena, through the connection 105, to the buses 103 and 104 and to the devices associated to them is prevented.

[0035] Figures 1 and 2 show three reed-bulb switches, such a switch not being foreseen on the fourth conductor.

[0036] In the example illustrated, said conductor is, in fact, the earth conductor of the supply bus 103, which is unlikely to be able to give rise to the adverse phenomena referred to previously, also because the three reed switches in any case prevent formation of a return line.

[0037] It is, however, clear that both of the conductors of the supply bus 103 may be provided with switches such as the switches 32.

[0038] The variant embodiment illustrated in Figures 3 and 4 (corresponding, respectively, to Figures 1 and 2) in general terms adopts the same circuit scheme already described previously. For this reason, to indicate parts and elements that are identical or equivalent to the ones already described, the same references that already appear in Figures 1 and 2 have been adopted in Figures 3 and 4.

[0039] The variant embodiment illustrated in Figures 3 and 4 foresees the extending also to the contacts (distal ends) 108 of the connection 105, which are located on the display unit 21, the same mechanism of protection described previously with reference to the contacts 107, which are located on the control unit 22.

[0040] Also in this case, the mechanism of protection - based upon the physical isolation of the contacts 108 from the unit 21 and the components that are located inside it - foresees the presence of a plurality of switches 35.

[0041] This time the switches (again consisting preferably of reed bulbs) are, however, located on the dis-

play unit 21 so as to enable their operation by a magnet 36 placed on the control unit 22.

[0042] Consequently, when the display unit 21 is mounted on the cycle, the two units 21 and 22 are close to one another and, just as the magnet 31 keeps the switches 32 closed, the magnet 36 keeps the switches 35 closed. The connection 105 consequently presents an electrical continuity feature, fully performing its function.

[0043] Conversely, when the display unit 21 is removed from the cycle, the two units 21 and 22 are moved away. The magnet 31 is no longer able to keep the switches 32 closed, and the magnet 36 is no longer able to keep the switches 35 closed.

[0044] The switches 32 and 35 open, and the contacts 107 and 108, which have remained exposed as a result of removal of the display unit 21 and interruption of the connection 105, are thus physically isolated from the respective units.

[0045] As regards the choice of the number and arrangement of the switches 35, there basically apply the same considerations made in regard to the switches 32.

[0046] Of course, as it is schematically illustrated in Figures 3 and 4, the positions of installation of the magnets 31 and 36 are chosen in such a way that the magnets are not reciprocally affected and, in particular, so as to prevent the magnet 36 from keeping the contacts 32 stably closed, and/or the magnet 31 from keeping the contacts 35 stably closed.

[0047] The solution just described enables considerable advantages to be achieved as compared to the known solutions.

[0048] The system for controlling the operating functions of a cycle as proposed herein advantageously enables automatic insulation of the points of connection on the control unit and/or on the display unit to be achieved through an interruption of the physical continuity of the signals from and towards the outside of said units.

[0049] Advantageously, the insulation obtained by the system according to the invention does not prevent the control unit and the power unit from operating independently.

[0050] The use of magnetic switches in the form of reed-bulb switches is particularly advantageous on a cycle, since it is exposed to considerable vibrations. In addition, the magnet on the display unit and/or on the control unit is an inexpensive device that does not require any sort of supply.

[0051] However, it is clear that the reed-bulb switches may be replaced by other equivalent magnetic or electromechanical devices, such as other types of mobile-element relays or Hall-effect-sensor relays, or else by switches, in particular switches controlled by means of other types of signal, such as an optical signal or a radio-frequency signal, or other types of sensors or proximity devices designed for inducing switching of a remotely located switch.

[0052] It will in fact be appreciated that the magnetic switches set on the control unit 22 and/or display unit 21 and the magnet placed on the display unit 21 and/or control unit 22 realize a proximity switching device that is activated for switching when the display unit 21 is removed or else installed on the cycle. Such a device may be built in a functionally equivalent way in many different forms.

[0053] By way of example (and without wishing in any way to exhaust the field of possibilities), the following solutions may be cited:

- proximity switches of a mechanical type;
- proximity switches of the solid-state type, such as photoemitter-photodetector pairs;
- optical switches, such as photocells or photodetectors in general, which are able to be exposed or obscured according to whether the display unit 21 is removed or else mounted on the cycle;

0 electromagnetic-field or ultrasound proximity sensors.

[0054] The control system may foresee that the control unit 22 will detect opening of the switches caused by removal of the display unit 21 and will intervene for inhibiting, in said conditions, operation of the system itself. Alternatively, the control unit 22 may be configured for detecting opening of the magnetic switches and implementing a set of basic locomotion functions, such as gear-shifting and derailleur-shifting, ensuring execution thereof in conditions of removal of the display unit from the cycle.

[0055] From what has been set forth above, it follows that, without prejudice to the principle of the invention, the details of implementation and embodiments may vary widely with respect to what is described and illustrated herein, without thereby departing from the scope of the present invention, as defined by the annexed claims.

Claims

1. A unit (22, 21) of a system for controlling the operating functions of a cycle, suitable for co-operating functionally with at least one complementary unit (21, 22) by means of at least one electrical connection (105); at least one (21, 22) between said unit (22, 21) and said complementary unit (21, 22) being configured for being selectively removable from the cycle, so that said at least one electrical connection (105) is an electrical connection which can be decoupled by leaving exposed on said units (22, 21) at least one distal contact part (107, 108), said unit (22, 21) being characterized in that associated to said at least one electrical connection (105) is at least one switch (32, 35), which can be selectively actuated for electrically insulating from said unit (22, 21) said exposed distal contact part (107, 108).

2. The unit (22, 21) according to Claim 1, **characterized in that** said switch (32, 35) can be operated according to the proximity of said complementary unit (21, 22) to said unit (22, 21).
3. The unit (22, 21) according to Claim 1 or 2, **characterized in that** said switch (32, 35) electrically connects said unit (22, 21) to said distal contact part (107, 108) when said unit (22, 21) and said complementary unit (21, 22) are near to one another.
4. The unit (22, 21) according to any one of the previous claims, **characterized in that** said electrical connection (105) is a multiwire electrical connection, which can be decoupled by leaving exposed on said unit (22, 21) a plurality of distal contact parts (107, 108), and **in that** associated to said electrical connection is a plurality of switches (32, 35), which can be selectively operated, as a result of the fact that said unit (22, 21) and said at least one complementary unit (21, 22) are moved away from one another, for electrically insulating from said unit (22, 21) said exposed distal contact parts (107, 108).
5. The unit (22, 21) according to Claim 4, **characterized in that** a line of said multiwire electrical connection (105) extends with continuity towards the respective distal part in absence of said switch (32, 35).
6. The unit (22, 21) according to any one of the previous claims, **characterized in that** said electrical connection (105) is inserted in at least one bus (103, 104).
7. The unit (22, 21) according to Claims 5 and 6, **characterized in that** said line, which extends with continuity, is an earth line of said at least one bus.
8. The unit (22, 21) according to any one of the previous claims, **characterized in that** said switch (32, 35) is a reed switch which can be operated by a magnet (31, 36).
9. The unit (22, 21) according to Claim 1 or 8, **characterized in that** said switch (32, 35) is mounted in a position such that, with said unit (22, 21) and said complementary unit (21, 22) co-operating together, it is exposed to said complementary unit (21, 22) so that it can be operated by an actuation element (31, 36), which is placed on said complementary unit (21, 22).
10. The unit (22, 21) according to any one of the previous claims, **characterized in that** it is configured for stable installation on said cycle.
11. The unit (22, 21) according to Claim 1, **characterized in that** it comprises at least one actuation element (36, 31) for operating at least one switch (35, 32) present in said complementary unit (21, 22).
12. The unit (22, 21) according to Claim 11, **characterized in that** said actuation element (36, 31) is positioned so as to interfere with a corresponding actuation element (31, 36) present in said complementary unit (22, 21).
13. A complementary unit (21, 22) of a system for controlling the operating functions of a cycle, designed for co-operating with at least one unit (22, 21) according to any one of Claims 1 to 12, **characterized in that** it comprises at least one actuation element (31, 36) for said switch (32, 35).
14. The complementary unit (21, 22) according to Claim 13, **characterized in that** said actuation element (31, 36) is a magnet.
15. The complementary unit (21, 22) according to Claim 13 or 14, **characterized in that** it is configured for being selectively removable from said cycle.
16. The complementary unit (21, 22) according to any one of Claims 13 to 15, **characterized in that** it is configured as a display unit (21).
17. The complementary unit (21, 22) according to Claim 13, **characterized in that** it comprises at least one switch (35, 32), which can be selectively actuated for electrically insulating from said units (21, 22) said exposed distal contact part (108, 107).

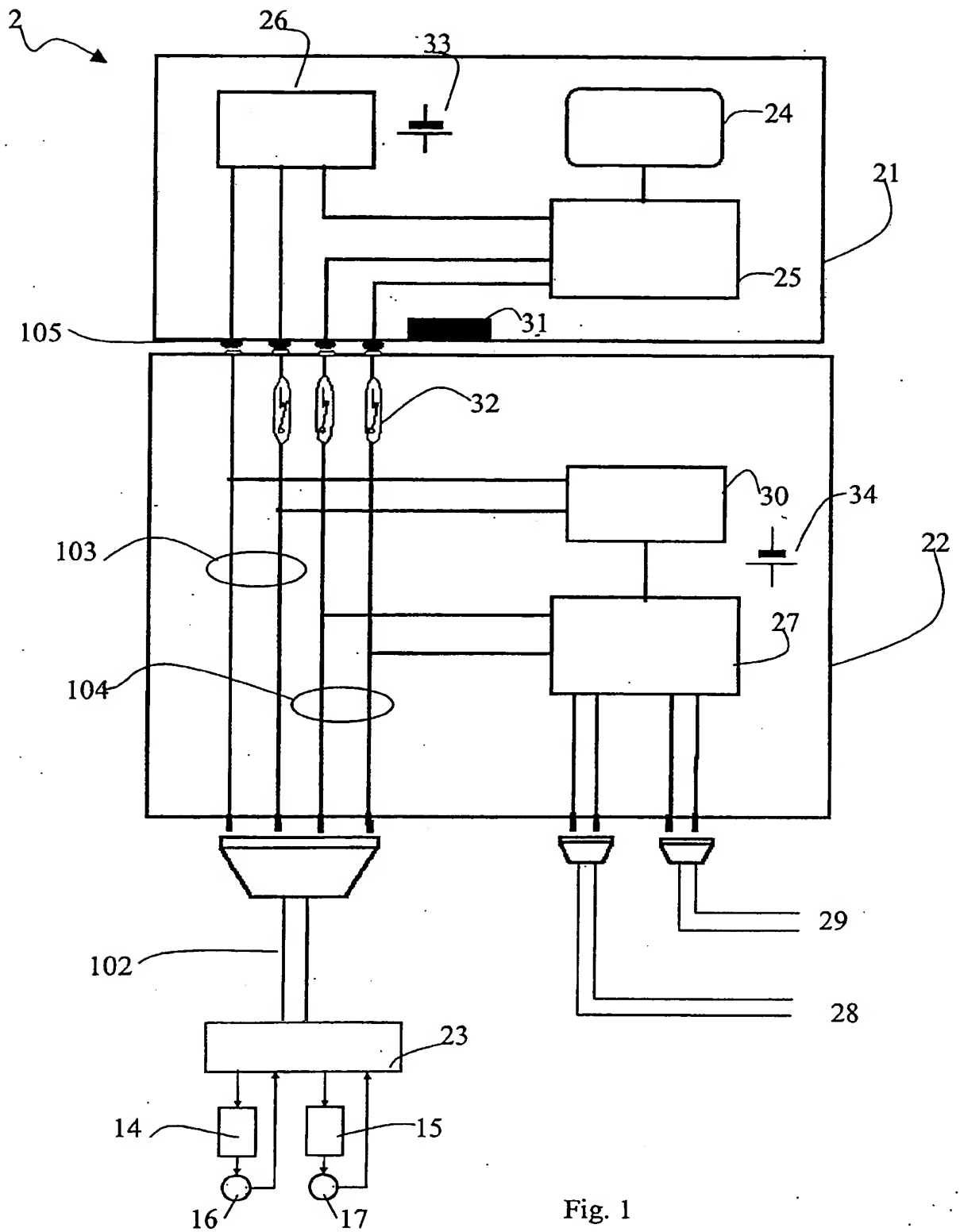


Fig. 1

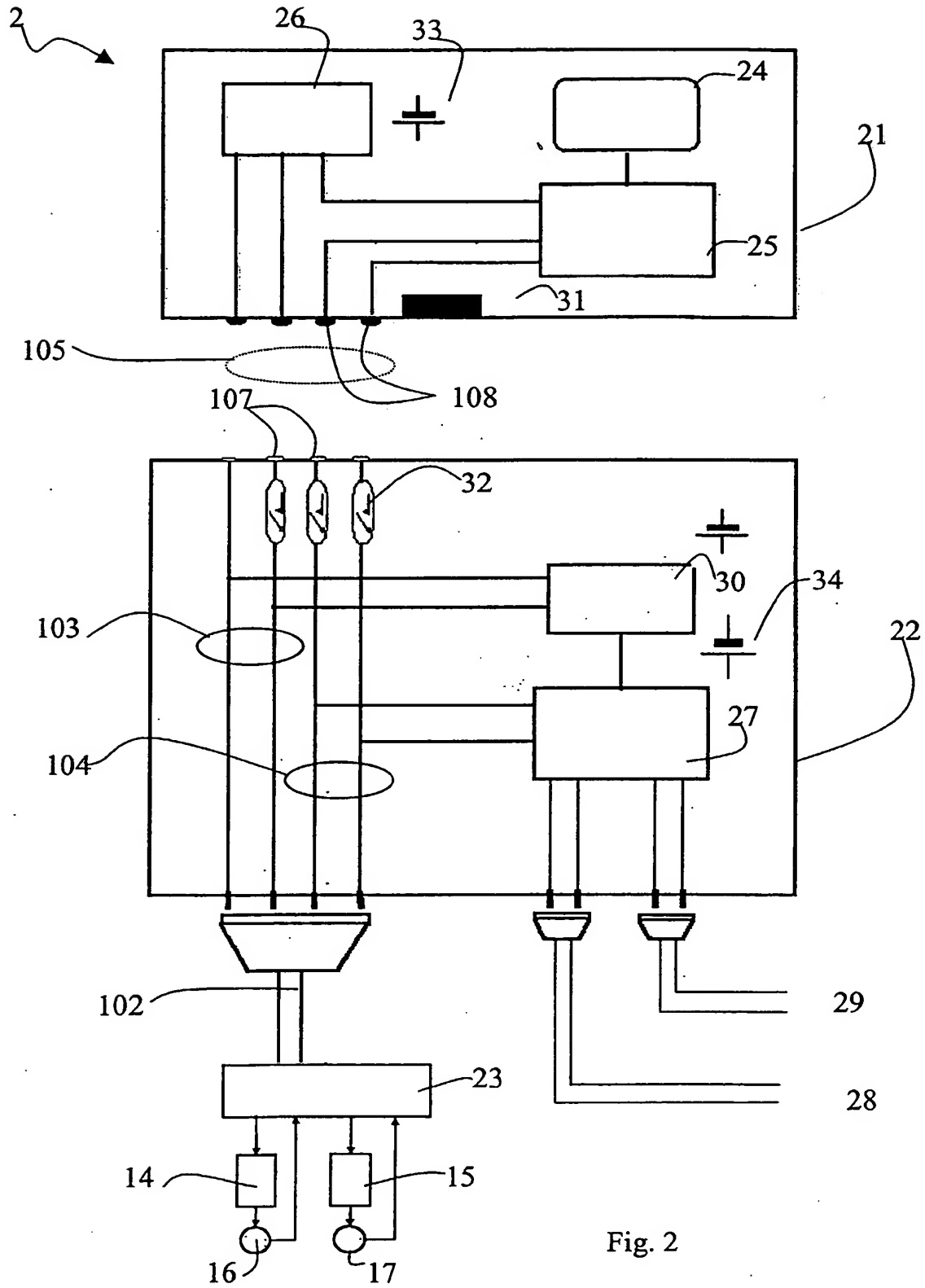


Fig. 2

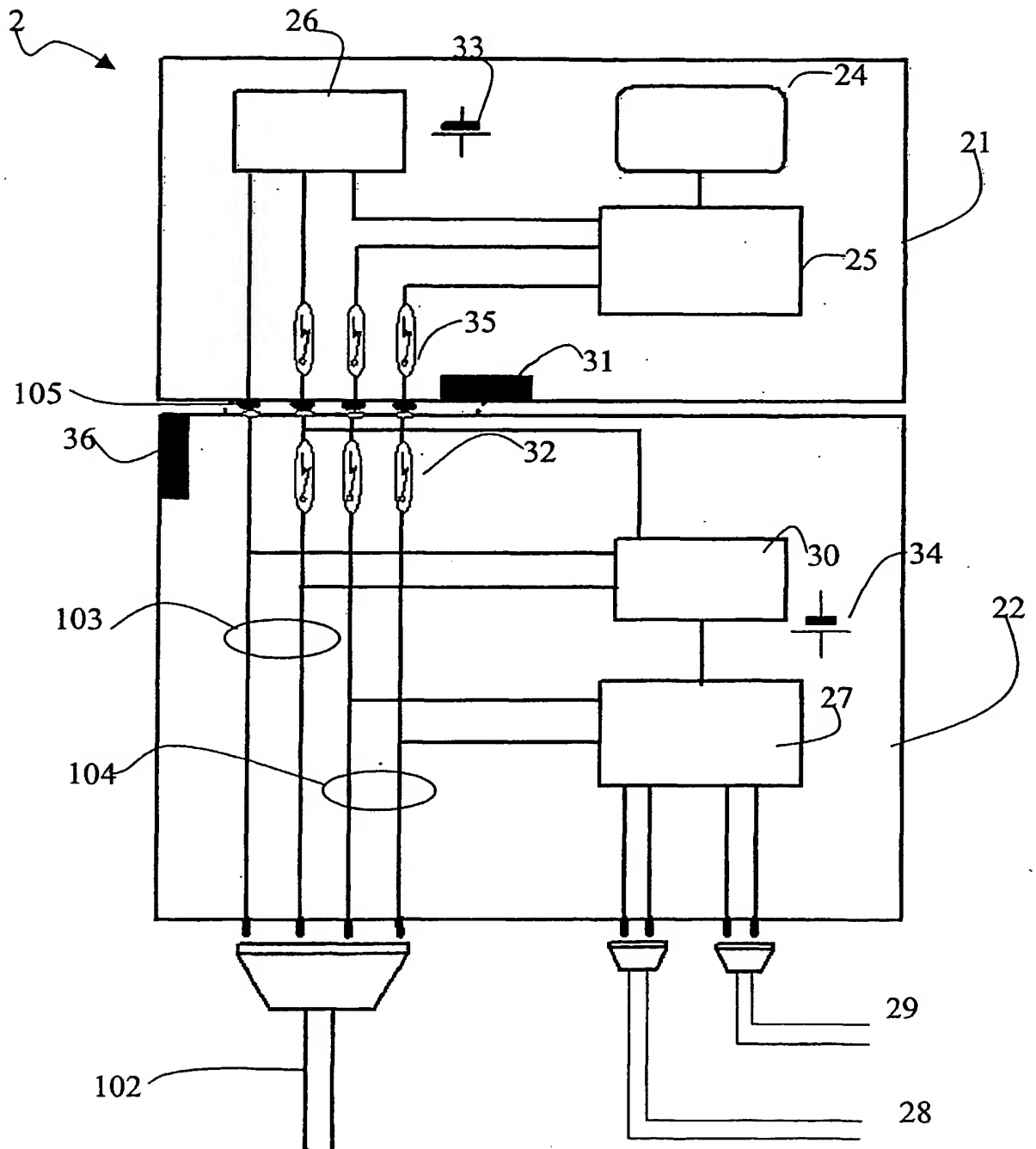


Fig. 3

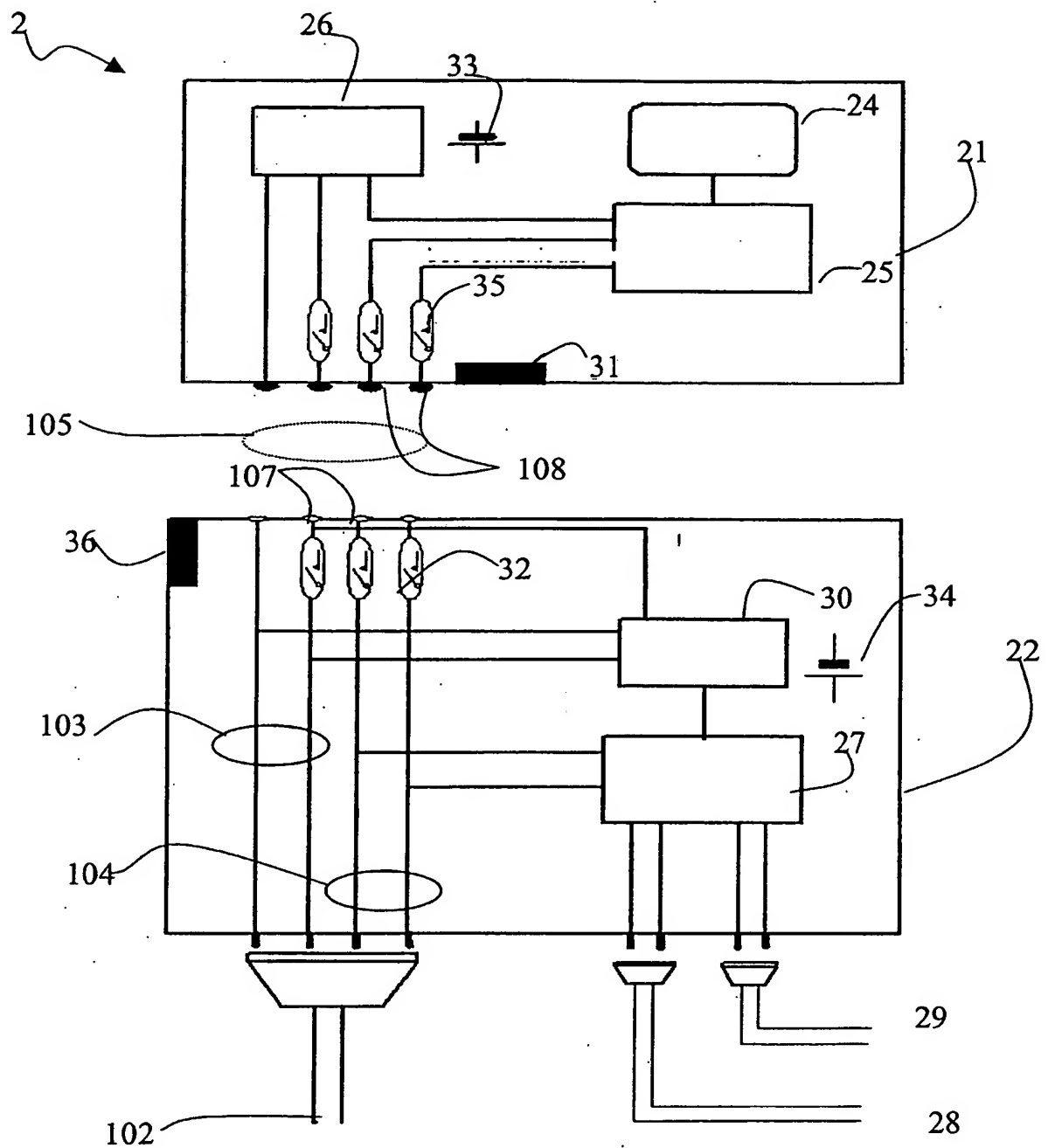


Fig. 4



European Patent
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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 03 42 5180

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT				
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.7)	
X	EP 1 238 902 A (SHIMANO KK) 11 September 2002 (2002-09-11)	13-17	H01R13/703 B62J39/00	
A	* paragraph [0041]; figures 1-3,15-17 *	1		
X	PATENT ABSTRACTS OF JAPAN vol. 1998, no. 09, 31 July 1998 (1998-07-31) & JP 10 112358 A (SANYO ELECTRIC CO LTD), 28 April 1998 (1998-04-28)	13-17		
A	* abstract; figures 1-7 *	1-3,6,8, 9,12		
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Y	FR 2 609 578 A (LEPAILLIER PATRICK) 15 July 1988 (1988-07-15)	1-17		TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.7)
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	The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search MUNICH		Date of completion of the search 15 September 2003	Examiner Jung, W	
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X: particularly relevant if taken alone Y: particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A: technological background O: non-written disclosure P: intermediate document T: theory or principle underlying the invention E: earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D: document cited in the application L: document cited for other reasons &: member of the same patent family, corresponding document				

EPO FORM 1503 03.02 (P04001)



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Application Number

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CLAIMS INCURRING FEES

The present European patent application comprised at the time of filing more than ten claims.

- ☐ Only part of the claims have been paid within the prescribed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for the first ten claims and for those claims for which claims fees have been paid, namely claim(s):
- ☐ No claims fees have been paid within the prescribed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for the first ten claims.

LACK OF UNITY OF INVENTION

The Search Division considers that the present European patent application does not comply with the requirements of unity of invention and relates to several inventions or groups of inventions, namely:

see sheet B

- ☐ All further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for all claims.
- ☒ As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying an additional fee, the Search Division did not invite payment of any additional fee.
- ☐ Only part of the further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for those parts of the European patent application which relate to the inventions in respect of which search fees have been paid, namely claims:
- ☐ None of the further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for those parts of the European patent application which relate to the invention first mentioned in the claims, namely claims:



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**LACK OF UNITY OF INVENTION
SHEET B**

Application Number
EP 03 42 5180

The Search Division considers that the present European patent application does not comply with the requirements of unity of invention and relates to several inventions or groups of inventions, namely:

1. Claims: 1-12

A unit of a system for controlling the operating functions
of a cycle

2. Claims: 13-17

A complementary unit of a system for controlling the
operating functions of a cycle

**ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT
ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO.**

EP 03 42 5180

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report.
The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on
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15-09-2003

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